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SUBJECT Woman Plagued by Father's Past FBI Investigation

MORLEY SAFER: This portrait is of a father and daughter. On August 25th, 1948 there was a report in the New York Herald Tribune stating that the father, Lieutenant John Rudder, was the first black man to hold a regular Marine Corps commission. It was an historic moment. But you will not find John Rudder's name in any history books. He gained no great reputation for having broken the color bar. But he did gain fame of another kind.

The young woman beside him is John Rudder's daughter Miriam. And it is that questionable fame of her father, the so-called sins of her father, as perceived by J. Edgar Hoover, that Miriam Rudder is paying for.

MIRIAM RUDDER: I feel I'm paying for it. I feel that if I should have a child, my children will pay for it, their children will pay for it. I don't know where it's going to end.

SAFER: Miriam Rudder is 24, a native of Washington, D.C. Three years ago she got a job here with Congress as a file clerk with the House Committee on Assassinations looking into who killed President Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

Committee Chairman Louis Stokes had an agreement with the CIA and the FBI to get any records he wanted as long as all committee employees got security clearances. Miriam Rudder was no problem. Her parents were.

MISS RUDDER: My personal background was very clean. I wasn't concerned at all with my clearance no.

SAFER: But you were concerned about your association with your parents.

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MISS RUDDER: Yes.

SAFER: Why?

MISS RUDDER: Because they had been damaged for so long that I saw what it did to them.

SAFER: So when you went to work for the committee, did you say, "Look, there may be a problem with my clearance"?

MISS RUDDER: Yes. I...

SAFER: And they said?

MISS RUDDER: When I talked to the chief of security he said that it wouldn't matter, that I was an adult, that I lived alone, I was self-supporting, and that I was clean as a whistle, not to concern myself.

SAFER: But Miriam's mother warned her she'd be disappointed.

MISS RUDDER: She went on and on about that they would never give me a clearance.

SAFER: And what did you say?

MISS RUDDER: I said that this wasn't the '50s and it wasn't Dick Tracy and they didn't do these kinds of thing anymore and Hoover was dead and forget about it. And I was wrong. I was very wrong.

SAFER: As we said, the problem was her parents. For better than 20 years the FBI had employed platoons of people to compile anything and everything Miriam Rudder's parents did. It fills eight volumes, who they spoke to, what they said, what their mail said, what their telephone conversations were about. The FBI was convinced they were communists, but the raw data also says the Communist Party, the CP, was suspicious of them.

The Rudders were activists for peace. They did attend protest rallies for civil rights, against loyalty oaths. Miriam's mother was white and Jewish, her father black and Quaker. Rudder was a black man a bit ahead of his time, a college graduate, was in combat as a Marine enlisted man in World War II, and after the war became a Marine Corps officer. Because of his Quaker convictions, he gave up his commission, became a schoolteacher, went to law school, and drove a cab part-time and raised five children.

In the early '50s, anyone who spoke up for civil rights and spoke against the Cold War and was black and had given up a Marine Corps commission was bound to attract the attention of the

FBI.

SAFER: It is alleged here that you once said you had no loyalty to this country.

JOHN RUDDER: That's a lie. This is my country. Four hundred years of Afro-American struggle, blood makes that the most reprehensible lie in there. My primary loyalty is to the United States of America.

SAFER: Mr. Rudder, have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

RUDDER: No, I've never been a member of the Communist Party. But to define the -- to answer the question yes or no would certainly evade the central issue here, which is whether or not an American has a right to belong to any political party whether it be Communist, Socialist, Democrat, Republic.

SAFER: Did the FBI ever ask you?

RUDDER: No. They never asked me whether or not I was ever a member. I find a thousand non-communist affidavits. There was never, never any effort to ascertain whether or not I was a member of any party. I happen to be a Democrat and have been a member of the Democratic Party for 30 years. But no one even asked that.

SAFER: Why would the FBI spend 30 years, heaven knows how many informers, informants, special agents, time, money to track John Rudder?

RUDDER: Probably they were somewhat hurt and somewhat determined to make me become an informer. I've always felt that an informer, a stool pigeon was the lowest type of human animal existing.

SAFER: Well, who asked you to do this?

RUDDER: Members of the FBI. And there were several other people whose names I will divulge to you if you want me to.

SAFER: Sure.

RUDDER: Bobby Kennedy was with a group of people who came to me once and asked me whether or not I'd be willing to serve. I think he was the McCarthy Committee then.

SAFER: When he was counsel to the McCarthy Committee?

RUDDER: Yes.

SAFER: Robert F. Kennedy asked you...

RUDDER: Whether or not I would be willing to work with certain agencies in the role as an informer.

SAFER: And what'd you tell young Kennedy?

RUDDER: I reminded him, as I reminded all of them, that there was a man named Judas who betrayed a man whom I have admired and devoted my entire life to, a man named Jesus Christ, that I will not betray anyone's confidence. It wouldn't matter whether or not they were activists or non-activists or Socialists or Democrats or workers. It is against the American tradition of informing. I would not accept a position as an informer.

SAFER: John, do you think that here was the case of a black man, Marine Corps officer, well-educated, informed sort of person, would have been -- excuse me -- a first class house Nigger...

RUDDER: Right.

SAFER: ...if he'd only come on and joined the team?

RUDDER: During slavery, it was, if you opposed slavery, you were a crazy Nigger.

J. Edgar Hoover was horrified that I had refused to become an informant. I have a document which suggests that in response to my refusal he ordered my appearance before a grand jury. There were wiser heads in the department that suggested that still a man must be accused of a crime or must have committed a crime.

SAFER: One of the more suspicious things that you did was the Sunday school you sent your daughter to.

RUDDER: My wife is Jewish. So we thought it was important for our children to grow up with an appreciation of Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism.

SAFER: Why would the FBI find a Jewish Sunday school suspicious?

RUDDER: They claimed that several of the officers were Communists, without any proof whatsoever. They claimed that several officers of the school were members of a subversive organization.

SAFER: When you were a kid growing up in your parents' home, how much Communist indoctrination did you get?

MISS RUDDER: I didn't know what Communist indoctrination was. I was brought up in an educated home, in a home that

stressed reading, that stressed the arts. And if that's Communist, then that's what I was brought up.

We grew up in a political household because of the era. We grew up during the civil rights era. But our politics of our house was the politics of this country, of poor people and black people being denied human rights and civil rights. And that was going on here in our country, not in Russia, not in Czechoslovakia. It was here.

So it was the American Dream that we were brought up under, not a Communist household.

SAFER: Did you have a chance to say this to the FBI?

MISS RUDDER: I never spoke with an agent from the FBI or any of the agencies.

SAFER: It is 1977 and the FBI is investigating Miriam for that congressional committee job. The last entry on her parents' record is 1967. The report on Miriam Rudder says the bureau spoke to 25 people, and they all vouched for her loyalty, trustworthy, intelligent, honest and hard-working. But there was that, quote, subversive, unquote, Sunday school when she was 10 years old.

The CIA is also investigating, and comes to a judgment: "Reasonable doubt on subject's loyalty because of her parents, to whom she is apt to be bound by ties of affection and obligation." And the CIA's recommendation is: "Security disapproval."

But the final decision on whether to keep her or let her go is up to the Chairman of the House Committee on Assassinations, Congressman Louis Stokes of Cleveland.

SAFER: What happened when you went into Congressman Stokes?

MISS RUDDER: Congressman Stokes was very sympathetic to my problem. He was torn between being a congressman and trying to be a good guy. So there was a conflict of interest in that. He said it hurt him as much as it was hurting me.

REP. LOUIS STOKES: I may have said that to her, because I did feel that it was not right for her not to be judged upon her own background and her own reputation, and that a judgment was being made with reference to that of her parents and other members of her family. And I thought that this was not right or proper, and that this was a denial of her rights.

SAFER: Do you consider her a security risk?

REP. STOKES: No, I don't. No. Based upon everything I know about Miriam Rudder, she would not have been, in my opinion, a security risk.

But in this case, she was in a very peculiar situation. She had been hired with the understanding that she would have to get a security clearance. And when she was unable to do so, I could not let the entire investigation be bogged down in some type of conflict with the CIA, and when we were operating under very limited time and a great deal of pressure from the Congress to get the investigation concluded.

SAFER: But isn't there something wrong here, where someone like Louis Stokes, great fighter for civil rights -- right?

REP. STOKES: That's right.

SAFER: Must have a dossier a mile long on him in the FBI.

REP. STOKES: I'm sure that I have.

SAFER: And it's conceivable that if Louis Stokes were not a congressman but a man going to work for a congressional committee, probably could be, conceivably, denied the job as a security risk. Start counting up all the people you've spoke to over the last 20 years.

REP. STOKES: That's conceivable.

SAFER: In essence, it just wasn't worth fighting the CIA over a file clerk. So Miriam Rudder was fired. The sin of John Rudder, if it was a sin, had been visited upon his daughter.

RUDDER: Here was a child who went to a Sunday school for less than a year, and on that basis it's considered an unacceptable risk, in spite of the fact that even the FBI suggests that she's a good, loyal, dedicated American. It is insanity.

MISS RUDDER: I want my name completely cleared. I would like to see a formal apology from the CIA and from the President's office to my parents and to myself.

SAFER: But don't you think that the government does have an obligation to all of us to protect our secrets, the government's secrets?

MISS RUDDER: I agree that our government has a serious job of protecting the country in the cases of real threat. If they are going to judge a person's involvement, a political involvement from 25-30 years ago and pass that speculation onto their children, they're chasing shadows. They're chasing people

like me and chasing people like my parents? It's incredible.

SAFER: Miriam Rudder did get a job working for a D.C. councilman, but she has higher hopes, wants to become a lawyer and eventually work for the government; but feels that whatever career she chooses, she'll be crippled by that failed security clearance, by unproved allegations against her father, by, according to John Rudder, his refusal to become a stool pigeon.

John, supposing you had, as they say, kept your nose clean. You would have been, probably, a pretty rich fellow right now, in politics, in the law, in education, in government, somewhere.

RUDDER: Yes. I would have probably felt less of myself, too. What does it matter to be a judge, if I wanted to be? What would it matter if at the end of that time of compromising my integrity, of my compromising my tradition as an Afro-African, compromising my sense of I am somebody? What could I say to my children?

I wanted them to be proud of me; and I'm sure that if you have children, you want them to be proud of you. I could not look my children in the face and say, "Here is a stool pigeon who sacrificed in order to get ahead."

SAFER: So you have no regrets.

RUDDER: I have no regrets. I love my country and I love the support that I've received. In spite of it, I'd do it all over again. But they scared me. They scared me.